



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About...Anthrax

##### What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease that mostly occurs in animals like goats, sheep, and cattle. Other animals, such as humans, can get this disease. It is a germ that forms a spore.

The disease is present all over the world but is most common in Africa and Asia. Outbreaks have rarely occurred in the United States. The spores can survive for decades in the soil.

##### How is anthrax spread?

There are three ways that humans can get anthrax:

- Skin: touching animals or animal parts that have the anthrax germs. The spores enter through cuts or breaks in the skin;
- Lungs: inhaling anthrax spores; and
- Stomach: eating meat that has not been fully cooked from an animal with anthrax.

##### Who is at risk for anthrax?

- People who work directly with the germ in the lab.
- People who work with animal hides or furs that have been shipped here from other parts of the world.
- People who handle animals or animal products in high-risk areas.
- Military members who are deployed to areas with high risk.

##### How do I know if I have anthrax?

Symptoms depend on how a person was exposed to anthrax:

- Skin: an itchy lesion that becomes a painless sore that appears black in the center. Lymph nodes in the area of the rash may swell. This type of exposure can be treated.
- Lungs: cold-like symptoms appear 1 to 6 days after you get the germ (most often within 48 hours). More severe breathing problems then develop. Shock follows, and death can occur within one to two days after cold-like symptoms begin. 75% of people with lung anthrax will die.
- Stomach: symptoms include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever. More severe symptoms follow, which include stomach pain, vomiting of blood, and diarrhea. If not treated, death occurs in 25% to 60% of people with stomach anthrax.

### **How is anthrax treated?**

Anthrax can be treated with certain medicines, but treatment must begin very soon after you get the germ. Lung anthrax should be treated prior to symptom onset.

Persons with exposure need to be seen by public health workers to decide if treatment should be started.

### **How is anthrax prevented?**

People with very high risk can be vaccinated:

- healthy people aged 18 to 65 years who have been exposed to anthrax;
- people who work with animal hides or furs that were shipped to the US from high-risk countries;
- veterinarians who handle animals or animal products in areas where anthrax is common; and
- United States military personnel.

The medicines used after exposure work very well at preventing anthrax disease.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)  
[United States Department of Defense](#)

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